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## **The Lay Person and his Christian Vocation in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II**

### **Abstract**

Pope John Paul II in his oral and written teaching emphasised that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of every human being and the same time underlined the value and dignity of every person, as well as his/her calling. In the 21st century, it is still worth recollecting the depth of teaching of John Paul II, especially the truth about the human being and his/her vocation through the mystery of the Redeemer. Therefore, this article will present some points from the documents written by Pope John Paul II, which refer to the Christian vocation of a lay man.

### **Keywords**

Pope John Paul II, Christian vocation, value and dignity of a human being.

During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II formulated a programme which as-tounds with its simplicity on the one hand, as well as with the logic and ef-fectiveness on the other. First, he ardently and emphatically proclaimed the rule of Jesus Christ in the world, only to encourage every Christian to open oneself to the Redeemer later. The Pope's celebrated call: "Do not be afraid!"

was an appeal aimed at every man and every woman to remember about the relation between man and God, about the vocation and need to return to Jesus Christ. The Pope from Poland often reminded us of the individual and personal nature of the human vocation and redemption. It was reflected in the title of his first, 1979, encyclical itself – “Redemptor hominis” – “The Redeemer of man”, not the Redeemer of people, which demonstrates the conviction that God is not concerned with an abstract man but rather a particular, historical person, living in a given time and place. The personal union with Jesus Christ, through the mystery of incarnation, redemption and sanctification, is manifested in the unrepeatability of the human person.<sup>1</sup> The Slavic Pope, on the one hand, indicated that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of every person, on the other hand, he stressed the value and dignity of every man, as well as his calling. Forty years after the announcement of the encyclical “Redemptor hominis”, it is worth recollecting the simplicity and, at the same time, the wealth of teaching of John Paul II, who emphasized that the truth about man and his vocation emerges only through the mystery of the Redeemer. Therefore, this article will present the excerpts from Pope John Paul II’s writings that refer to man, particularly to the lay man and his Christian vocation.

## 1. The dynamic relation of man and God

Pope John Paul II noticed that the concept of man that is promoted by the world lies at the root of the serious socio-cultural crisis. This is a concept which exalts the ideas of humanism, whilst man and his personal dignity are still disregarded. Under such circumstances, John Paul II, from the beginning of his pontificate, had undertaken the task of promoting the value and personal dignity of man as a person who, by his nature, demands respect. Thus, discovering the deepest truth about man was dictated by the necessity to defend humanity, which was threatened by various ideologies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Redemptor hominis* 13-14; Z. Zdybicka, *Personalistyczne podstawy prawdy o człowieku zbawionym*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Redemptor hominis. Tekst i komentarze*, (ed.) Z. Zdybicka, Lublin 1982, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, Kraków 1985, p. 28.

The foundation of the relation between man and God is the fact of the permanent affiliation of man to God<sup>3</sup>. This relation, expressed in the categories of the ultimate purpose as well as the eschatological fullness of human existence, regarding the Covenant offered to man as the affirmation of God Himself. The creative act is God's sovereign decision and is anterior in its nature since God comes to man and offers Himself to man. Man's attitude in accepting and acknowledging this Gift is, in turn, an act of adoration of God and, at the same time, an act of elevating man – his divinization. Thus, God becomes the only, and, at the same time, the highest and ultimate source and guarantor of personal dignity and perfection.<sup>4</sup>

Owing to the fact that man was created as a conscious and free being, his bond with God is also of the moral character. Therefore, God is recognized, acknowledged and ultimately loved as a Person and a Giver of personal existence, and, at the same time, the sense and purpose of existence. It is worth bearing in mind that the relation between God and man cannot be understood as a static bond, but rather, to the same degree, as something dynamic. The creative act constitutes a starting point that is complemented by an act of opening our hearts to God.<sup>5</sup>

God is received with faith not only as the Absolute, the First Cause of existence but also as the Creator whom man owes full submission of intellect and will. In practical terms, it means that man, as a being, belongs to God in the entirety of his nature and existence – not only in the act of coming into being, in the surrounding nature, but also in the “truth” of existence, i.e. both in the ontological, as well as the existential and moral dimension.<sup>6</sup> This affiliation is manifested in the description of creating man in “the likeness and image of God.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Evangelium Vitae* 34.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Veritatis Splendor* 8-10; J. Stala, *Der Mensch als Person: Die bestimmende Grundlage für Johannes Paul II. in seinem Bild von der Familie*, „The Person and the Challenges” 2 (2012) nr 2, pp. 41-59; J. Stala, *Die Transzendenz als bestimmendes Merkmal der Person in der Anthropologie und der Pädagogik Johannes Pauls II.*, „The Person and the Challenges” 2 (2012) nr 1, pp. 61-75; J. Stala, E. Osewska, *Anders erziehen in Polen. Der Erziehungs- und Bildungsbegriff im Kontext eines sich ständig verändernden Europas des XXI. Jahrhunderts*, Tarnów 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Evangelium Vitae* 35.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Veritatis Splendor* 6-17.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1: 26-27.

Man, created in God's image and likeness, is represented here as a "partner" of the God-Creator, capable of free choice, of listening to Him, of conducting a filial dialogue with Him in the spirit of love and collaboration with Him. This truth becomes deeper and, at the same time, achieves fullness in the Person of Jesus Christ and His saving work.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, with His attitude, He indicates the ideal of perfection that acknowledges the Father's authority, since love is expressed in such a stance. The relation between man and God attains a new dimension in the soteriological perspective through Christ. For, in Baptism, which renews man and gives him back to God, man may have a chance to become a "new being."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the renewed man becomes similar to Christ<sup>10</sup>, has full participation in life that springs from Him<sup>11</sup> and thus his life is "hidden with Christ in God."<sup>12</sup> The bond with Christ, which stems from faith and the sacraments, gives the relation between man and God a new form.

## 2. Man reaffirmed through Redemption

Pope John Paul II emphasized that the truth of the relation of man with God, as well as his vocation to sanctity, constitute fundamental tenets of the Church. From the motif of resemblance to the Creator springs the motif of trust and belief that man's principal vocation is to go beyond one's limits and needs to open up towards God.<sup>13</sup> The Polish Pope unceasingly professed the truth about God who is living and present, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

While searching for the sense of his Christian vocation, which John Paul II consistently reminded us of, man cannot disregard what was revealed to humanity by God in the person and life of Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that natural revelation plays an important role in Christian theology, it is, however, imperfect. The new revelation began at the moment of God's intervention into the fate of a collapsing humanity, evolving throughout the history of the Chosen People,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 4-8; *Redemptor Hominis* 7-12.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 15: 49.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Gen. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; *Redemptoris Missio* 5-7.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Acts 3:15; Col. 3:4.

<sup>12</sup> Col. 3:3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Catechesi tradendae* 10; Jan Paweł II, *Przekroczyć próg nadziei*, Lublin 1994, p. 31; K. Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy. Studium o realizacji Vaticanum II*, Kraków 2003, pp. 123-124.

and reached its apogee in the Incarnation of the Eternal Word.<sup>14</sup> By coming into this world, Jesus Christ restored man's resemblance to God, which had been distorted by sin.<sup>15</sup> The Pope also remarked that all domains of human life had been elevated in Jesus Christ. Owing to its personal structure, fully expressed through intelligence, will and love, every man turns directly to God.<sup>16</sup> When God reveals Himself and man, in faith, opens his heart to this revelation, then, man is revealed to himself and, at the same time, affirmed in his own being.<sup>17</sup> John Paul II constantly reminded us that meeting Jesus Christ is the event which gives meaning to human existence and challenges by revealing horizons of freedom.<sup>18</sup> Only in Christ may man discover the fullness of life and hope since it is only He who can satisfy man's heart, give him strength and the joy of life.<sup>19</sup>

The Incarnation of the Son of God, His decision to become a man, with all the consequences of submitting Himself to the laws of human nature, ultimately to dying and death, is a manifestation of the unparalleled solidarity of Jesus Christ with man and his human fate, which is marked by suffering and death. Jesus Christ reveals, in a special way, God's unbounded love to man. Each man is willed by God, chosen by Him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory.<sup>20</sup> In the Incarnation of the Son of God, manifests the ontic humanism in which He turns to everyone. Therefore, each immanent humanism that negates and rules out the supernatural, transcendence or grace, according to John Paul II, has no grounds in what may be described as the "personal profile" of man in the work of salvation and in the Church.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Dives in Misericordia* 2 & 7; *Redemptor Hominis* 18.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 7; *Veritatis Splendor* 10; Jan Paweł II, *List do młodych całego świata. Parati semper* 1985, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Wierzę w Jezusa Chrystusa Odkupiciela*, Watykan 1989, p. 332; Jan Paweł II, *Dokonać syntezy wiary i kultury. Przemówienie do przedstawicieli katolickiego świata uniwersyteckiego*, Meksyk, Guadalupe 31 I 1979, in: *Wiara i kultura, Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, Rzym 1986, p. 15; M. Jaworski, *Wyzwolenie człowieka w chrześcijaństwie*, in: *Problem wyzwolenia człowieka*, (eds.) T. Styczeń, M. Radwan, Rzym 1987, pp. 242-243.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Lublin 1986, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Dives in Misericordia* 1; Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na światowy dzień młodzieży* 1994, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na światowy dzień młodzieży* 1989, 1; *Veritatis Splendor* 8-10.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 13.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 21.

### 3. Man may understand oneself only in Christ

The possibility of discovering one's sense of life by giving it the quality of Divine vocation, which is consistently attributed to Christianity, was seen by the Pope as an "opportunity" presented to man by God through Jesus Christ so man can find himself, the full truth about himself and a paragon of humanity.<sup>22</sup> Christ, by bringing him his grace, causes the dignity of the human person to be elevated to an unimaginable level. Thus, in order for man to understand himself completely, he must come closer to Jesus Christ with his anxiety, uncertainty as well as with his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death. Man needs to learn and assimilate the entire reality of the Incarnation and Redemption.<sup>23</sup> Only in this context may we place John Paul II's conviction that man cannot be understood without Christ.<sup>24</sup> This declaration has nothing to do with abandoning a reflection of man about himself but accentuates the fact that man will remain unknown to himself, without the explanation which he receives in Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup>

John Paul II stressed that every man, thanks to being called, from the beginning, to unity with Jesus Christ, and, at the same time to participating in the life of God Himself, receives a possibility of specific development. This opportunity was offered to him as a gift and it is capable of giving sense to his everyday existence to the extent to which he consistently follows the road to ultimate happiness and does not attempt to shape it on his own. However, despite the presence of Jesus Christ in various domains of human life, the valid problem

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 1; *Redemptor Hominis* 10; *Fides et Ratio* 70; Jan Paweł II, *Homilia podczas Mszy św. odprawianej na lotnisku Areoklubu, Włocławek 7 VI 1991*, in: Jan Paweł II, *Bogu dziękujecie. Ducha nie gǎście! Czwarła wizyta duszpasterska w Polsce, 1-9 VI 1991*, Rzym 1991, p. 194; Jan Paweł II, *Chrystus – Źródło nowej kultury dla Europy, Do uczestników przedsynodalnego sympozjum poświęconego Europie*. 14 I 1999, 3; Jan Paweł II, *Bogactwa człowieka. Przemówienie do uczestników mityngu przyjaźni między narodami*, 29 VIII 1982, in: *Nauczanie papieskie*. Rok 1982, pp. 318-319.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Veritatis Splendor* 8; S. Nowosad, *Orędlie moralne Jana Pawła II jako pamięć i tożsamość Kościoła*, in: *Kościół w czasach Jana Pawła II*, (eds.) M. Rusecki, K. Kaucha, J. Mastej, Lublin 2005, p. 134.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 8 & 11; Jan Paweł II, *Afryka ma coś własnego do ofiarowania światu. Przemówienie do prezydenta Republiki Ghany, Akra, 8 V 1980*, in: *Nauczanie papieskie*. Rok 1980, vol. III/I, pp. 534-537.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Redemptor hominis* 10; Jan Paweł II, *Bądźcie świadkami prawdy i miłości, Przemówienie do społeczności uniwersyteckiej, Leuven 20 V 1985*, in: *Wiara i kultura, Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, Rzym 1986, pp. 286-294.

is still for man to abide beside Him and be faithful to His covenant.<sup>26</sup> Alas, man, by forgetting that he is not a self-sufficient being, thinks that he may reject Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Every person must deal with the mystery of Jesus Christ, face it, and, if he wants – welcomes it in his life.<sup>28</sup> In this context, it is difficult not to see why the central point of the papal reflection was the call to accept Jesus Christ as the Redeemer. Only when man is in close contact with Jesus Christ, opens his heart to Him, strives to live in sanctifying grace, may he discover that human life has a meaning, it is a conscious and free answer to God's call – a discovery that human life is a vocation.<sup>29</sup> As it was argued by the Pope, the paths to vocation are, indeed, different, still, the one thing which is valid for each of those paths is not to lose what is the most precious: one's own humanity, conscience and dignity.<sup>30</sup>

What John Paul II saw in man was, first and foremost, a being whose existence and all actions spring from the relation with God. Therefore, nothing can excuse man from living his human and Christian vocation as well as from his participation in the growth of the Kingdom of God in a new and even more valuable manner.<sup>31</sup> In this situation, the Pope often appealed to people, especially the youth, engaged in everyday activities, not to be afraid to follow the path of Jesus Christ and to allow Divine grace to work within them. John Paul II was convinced that the Christ's call "Follow me" is uttered when someone strives for transforming the entirety of temporal affairs in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel.<sup>32</sup> All Christians are, therefore, called to share the radical novelty of life

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Historia zbawienia rozpoczyna się od każdego człowieka*. Homilia, Le Bourget 1 VI 1980, in: *Nauczanie papieskie*. Rok 1980, vol. III/I, Poznań-Warszawa 1985, p. 704.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ecclesia in Europa* 44; *Redemptoris Missio* 7; Jan Paweł II, *Homilia w czasie Mszy św. odprawionej na Błoniach*, Kraków 9 VI 1979, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 16-18; Jan Paweł II, *Dar powierzony dobre woli ludzi*. Homilia na XV Światowy Dzień Pokoju, 1 I 1982, in: *Nauczanie papieskie*. Rok 1982, vol. V/I, Poznań 1993, pp. 1-4; Jan Paweł II, *Istnieje – trzeba to stwierdzić bez lęku – chrześcijańska koncepcja kultury*. Audiencja generalna, Rzym 8 II 1984, in: *Wiara i kultura*, p. 233.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 1.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, Gdańsk 12 VI 1987, *Homilia w czasie liturgii słowa skierowana do młodzieży zgromadzonej na Westerplatte*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Redemptor Hominis* 21; *Christifideles Laici* 53.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *List do młodych całego świata*. *Parati semper* 1985, 9; Jan Paweł II, *Orędzie na światowy dzień młodzieży* XVI, 6; Jan Paweł II, *W codziennym życiu spotykajcie Chrystusa*, 21 III 2005, Międzynarodowy Kongres UNIV 2005, 3.

received from Jesus.<sup>33</sup> It does not concern the information about God but rather shaping the Christian attitude. For the Christian lay faithful, the evangelical values of truth, justice, love, peace cannot remain merely words but a task to be completed in the personal and social life. It is a task of utmost importance since through the ministry of the lay faithful, the world can truly open its borders and economic and political systems to the saving power of Jesus Christ. Their distinctive style of life obliges them to animate temporal affairs with Christian spirit by using their distinctive and irreplaceable means.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. The abundance of gifts and vocations of the Christian laity

In compliance with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II expressed his belief that since the structure of the Church demands a diversity of gifts and services, then, each vocation and call to holiness is equal and worthy of respect.<sup>35</sup> Different states of life in the Church are closely related to one other, and may even be characterized by reciprocal subordination. When all taken together, however, as well as if considered individually, they all serve the growth of the Church and are a variety that is closely united in the mystery of the communion of the Church as well as dynamically coordinated in the performance of its mission. Individual vocations are different and, at the same time, complementary, characterized by their own original and unique physiognomy but, on the other hand, related to other vocations and playing a supporting role for them.<sup>36</sup> The mission of the Church is carried out not only by the ministers in virtue of the Sacrament of Orders but also by all the lay faithful, who, owing to their Baptismal state and their specific vocation, in the measure proper to each person, participate in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of Christ. John Paul II indicated that the same Holy Spirit who directs and guides the Church, lavishes various hierarchical and charismatic gifts on all the baptized, calling them to be, each in their own way, active and co-responsible.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 7.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 36; A. Lewek, *Nowa ewangelizacja w duchu Soboru Watykańskiego II*, vol. 2, Katowice 1995, pp. 320-322.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 16; *Ecclesia in Oceania* 43.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 55; K. Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy*, p. 338.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 20-23.

In the context of the present discussion, it is worth pointing out that particularly over the period of the Second Vatican Council there had been a notable appreciation of the position of the laity as well as the emphasis that owing to their distinctive vocation, through dealing with lay matters, they attempt search for the Kingdom of God by living in the world. The appreciation of the lay faithful results from the awareness of the Church that the reality of the contemporary Christian's life is currently characterized by a diversity which was previously unknown.

Pope John Paul II in the exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* recalled *Apostolicam Actuositatem* underlining that the laity "share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ"<sup>38</sup> although placed this vocation largely within the 'secular'<sup>39</sup> and 'temporal'<sup>40</sup> orders. In the beginning of *Christifidelis Laici*, he remarked that "the post-conciliar path of the lay faithful' has encountered 'the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural, and political world."<sup>41</sup>

There exists a continuity of human vocation. Redemption revealed by Jesus Christ begins on earth even though it transcends its earthly phase. Catholic laypeople, by combining human matters with the Divine matters, may transfer their family, social and professional life to an axiologically higher level.<sup>42</sup> Thus, John Paul II indicated that the vocation of a Christian living in the world does not mean disconnecting oneself from the world but transcending it, full of its love and presence in it.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 7 & 31.

<sup>41</sup> *Christifidelis Laici* 2.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Strzeszewski, *Chrześcijanin Świecki w życiu społecznym i gospodarczym*, „Communio” 1 (1981) 6, pp. 44-55.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 15; *Christifideles Laici* 56; *Christifideles Laici* 59; K. Wojtyła, *Konsekracja świata. Granice autonomii doczesności*, in: *Powołanie człowieka*, vol. 5: *Odpowiedzialni za świat*, Poznań-Warszawa 1982, pp. 205-215; K. Jeżyna, *Moralne przesłanie nowej ewangelizacji. Wezwanie do odnowy Kościoła i świata*, Lublin 2002, pp. 331-333; J. Przybyłowski, *Znaczenie nowej ewangelizacji dla duszpasterstwa młodzieży. Studium pastoralne*, Lublin 2001, p. 110.

## 5. Areas of the fulfilment of the Christian vocation of the laity

The witness to faith, resulting from their Christian vocation, may be borne by laypeople in different ways: by defending the dignity of every human person, particularly in defence of their right to live, religious freedom or by taking part in the mission of Christianizing the culture. It seems, however, that the lay faithful may best contribute to the expected work of the renewal of the world by their service towards overcoming the crisis which the Christian family has live through. Indeed, marriage and the family constitute the primary and fundamental area of social involvement of the laity.<sup>44</sup> The upbringing undertaken in a family bears fruit not only within the family itself but also within society, the nation and the Church since young people who are properly formed enter social, professional and ecclesial structures, bearing everything which they acquired in the family.<sup>45</sup>

Another area for the apostolate of laypeople is also the socio-economic life. Their role principally consists in following the ethical, moral and social rules contained within the teaching of the Church, which they ought to learn and implement in their socio-economic activities.<sup>46</sup> Christians cannot remain passive, particularly in the context of the numerous, present-day social problems.<sup>47</sup>

The modern world poses to the lay faithful the same, and, at the same time, new task – being a leaven for goodness, truth and justice.<sup>48</sup> The fact of living and acting in the world has a manifold meaning for laypeople: anthropological and social, but also strictly theological and ecclesiastical. It can only be comprehended in the light of the creative and redemptive act of God, who gifted the world to people so that they could participate in the work of creation and free it from the influence of sin. It can hardly be overlooked that the witness of faith of the lay faithful may play its role for the world only if they manage

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 34-40; *The Contemporary Family: Local and European Perspectives*, eds. E. Osewska, J. Stala, Kraków 2015; *Focus on Family and Education*, red. E. Osewska, Split 2016; *Strong Families – Strong Societies*, ed. E. Osewska, Kraków 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Religious Education / Catechesis in the Family. A European Perspective*, eds. E. Osewska, J. Stala, Warszawa 2010; *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa 2014; *Focus on Family and Education*, red. E. Osewska, Split 2016; *Strong Families – Strong Societies*, ed. E. Osewska, Kraków 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 44.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 3.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 11; *Christifideles Laici* 15.

to overcome the discrepancy between the Gospel and their own lives by giving all their activities – in the family, work, society, the cohesion characteristic of the Christian vocation and, at the same time, giving hope for creating, in the world, a society functioning according to the commandments of the Gospel.<sup>49</sup> The lay faithful cannot undertake any activity which would contradict the moral and social teaching of the Church.<sup>50</sup>

If the laity are willing to take up their call to change the world responsibly, they may not, according to John Paul II, resign from their duty to actively participate in the political life. They are expected to enliven it with the Christian spirit and ensure that it is conducive to the growth of the common good. The policymaking activity which Catholics are involved in may be regarded as a form of the evangelical mission provided that it constitutes genuine service for the human person, society and the Church.<sup>51</sup> This involvement springs from the spirit of responsibility for man, the Church and the world and should lead to the growth of the common good. The political activity ought to include the promotion and defence of such values as peace and public order, freedom and equality, respect for human life and dignity of the human person, concern for the environment and justice. The style of the lay faithful must be striving for the genuine development of man – solidarity with all human persons, which means involvement for the common good.<sup>52</sup> The described concern for all domains of the human world is also related to ecology since without the commitment of the responsible laypeople, the world is threatened with destruction and annihilation.<sup>53</sup>

The fact that Catholics belong to the lay part of the society obliges them to show interest in building a decent life for all people on earth. The primary objective is to shape the proper image of social life within the political norms, especially democracy understood as a manifestation of social will aiming at the establishment of optimal living conditions for people on earth. It is done as part of a pluralistic dialogue in which the Christian faith and system of values must

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 17; *Christifideles Laici* 34-36; J. Zabielski, *Relatywizm moralny*, in: Jan Paweł II. *Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, (eds.) J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna, Radom 2005, pp. 453-462.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Nota doktrynalna dotycząca pewnych kwestii związanych z udziałem i postawą katolików w życiu politycznym*, No. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 42.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* 38.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis* 47; *Christifideles Laici* 41.

be considered a significant element of argumentation. However, in order for the activity of Catholic politicians to be effective, they need to set up diverse groups that would establish contacts with other parties or organizations, or communities with similar ideological underpinnings.<sup>54</sup> The lay faithful, who, owing to their vocation or their occupation, are directly involved in the development of modern civilization, are also tasked with ensuring that the advancement and defence of the rights of the human being could find a solid and dynamic foundation in his very essence, an essence which the preaching of the Gospel reveals to all.<sup>55</sup>

John Paul II argued that a crucial area of activity of lay Christians is also the parish, treated as a community of brothers and sisters afire with a unifying spirit, consisting of not only priests but also the lay faithful. Therefore, they need to strengthen their conviction that their apostolic mission within the parish is of paramount importance. It concerns their work and involvement in parish and pastoral councils, a variety of groups as well as their participation in the catechesis, pastoral care of the family, charity campaigns, Catholic associations and religious communities.<sup>56</sup>

In John Paul II's view, the fundamental condition for a Christian to take up his vocation, regardless of the determinants of his life, had always remained faith, since it is faith which allows a person to identify, accept and fulfil his

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Nota doktrynalna dotycząca pewnych kwestii związanych z udziałem i postawą katolików w życiu politycznym*, No. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 38.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 26; A. Lewek, *Nowa ewangelizacja w duchu Soboru Watykańskiego II*, vol. 2, pp. 345-346; J. Stala, *Familienkatechese in Polen um die Jahrhundertwende. Probleme und Herausforderungen*, Tarnów 2008; J. Stala, *W kierunku integralnej edukacji religijnej w rodzinie. Próba refleksji nad nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w kontekście polskich uwarunkowań*, Tarnów 2010; J. Stala, *Formation of Adult Lay Catholics for Commitment in the World*, „The Person and the Challenges“ 7 (2017) nr 2, pp. 93-106; J. Stala, *Punina postojanja osebe – civilizacija ljubavi u kontekstu postmoderne*, „Crkva u svijetu“ (2015) nr 3, pp. 469-477; J. Stala, *Die Polen angesichts der Umbrüche im politischen und gesellschaftlichen Bereich. Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach der Unabhängigkeit Polens*, „The Person and the Challenges“ 5 (2015) nr 1, pp. 191-199. r. 2008; J. Stala, *W kierunku integralnej edukacji religijnej w rodzinie. Próba refleksji nad nauczaniem Jana Pawła II w kontekście polskich uwarunkowań*, Tarnów 2010; J. Stala, *Formation of Adult Lay Catholics for Commitment in the World*, „The Person and the Challenges“ 7 (2017) nr 2, ISSN 2083-8018, pp. 93-106; J. Stala, *Punina postojanja osebe – civilizacija ljubavi u kontekstu postmoderne*, „Crkva u svijetu“ (2015) nr 3, pp. 469-477; J. Stala, *Die Polen angesichts der Umbrüche im politischen und gesellschaftlichen Bereich. Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach der Unabhängigkeit Polens*, „The Person and the Challenges“ 5 (2015) nr 1, pp. 191-199.

personal calling. Without faith, it is difficult to imagine coping with an answer to the problems and hopes that life presents to every human being.<sup>57</sup> An incredibly important role in the fulfilment of a vocation by a Christian is also played by the sacramental and community life. The ability to look at the holy sacraments from the perspective of man's calling is particularly significant in the period of the existential quest of young people, when they conceive their life project. It, thus, allows one to discover and take up the sacramental life, understood as a celebration, bringing in effective assistance in the fulfilment of the human and Christian vocation.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, discovering the value of the ecclesial community as one that is upholding and reinforcing the life of faith, indicates to a young person a need for belonging to the Church and drawing upon its sources.

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Pope John Paul II, seeing in Jesus Christ the source, foundation and the ultimate authority for man, he emphasized human dignity and the relevance of man's affiliation with God throughout his pontificate. Jesus Christ fully reveals the mystery of God the Father and His love to man, and, at the same time, He fully reveals man to man himself and shows him his vocation. John Paul II reflected that the Christian vocation is a project of life proposed by God to each, individual human being, living in a particular period and historical conditions. Every Christian is invited to bear fruit in his life by living for God in Jesus Christ and following the commandments of the Gospel. The lay man, by responding to the love of God and His call, undertakes the fulfilment of his vocation in accordance with his gifts, talents, capabilities, the place in the society and Church, current challenges and, at the same time, opens his heart to the eternal life, communion of blessed love with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Christifideles Laici* 34; *Veritatis Splendor* 109-110; J. Nagórny, *Teologia moralna jako eklezjalna nauka wiary w świetle „Veritatis splendor”*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Veritatis splendor. Tekst i komentarze*, (ed.) A. Szostek, Lublin 1995, pp. 278-279.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Jan Paweł II, *List Apostolski II do młodych całego świata z okazji Międzynarodowego Roku Młodzieży*, 31 III 1985, No. 9; E. Tkocz, *Chrześcijańska formacja młodzieży w świetle orędzi Jana Pawła II na Światowe Dni Młodzieży*, Katowice 2005, p. 88.

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